

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAG: PGOV, PINT, TH

SUBJECT: ELECTION ROUND UP

REF: BANGKOK 0921

SUMMARY. GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING PROPOSAL TO LIMIT
NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES. SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN AND
OTHER DISSIDENT SOCIAL AGRARIANS CONSIDERING FORMATION
OF NEW POLITICAL PARTY OR JOINING DEMRAT PARTY KAMNAN"
PUYAIBAN (LOCAL ELECTIONS) BILL SENT TO KING BUT SPECULATION
WIDESPREAD GOVERNMENT WANTS BILL TO LAPSE. END SUMMARY.

1. THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT HAS UNDER STUDY A PROPOSAL
DRAFTED BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO LIMIT THE NUMBER
OF POLITICAL PARTIES. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, DEPUTY
MINISTER OF INTERIOR BU LOET LTETPRICHA, DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER AND DEFENSE MINISTER PRAMAN ADIREKSAN, AND
MINISTER OF JUSTICE BUNTHENG THONGSAWAT INFORMED
REPORTERS LAST WEEK THAT THE PROPOSAL WOULD BE SUB-
MITTED TO THE CABINET ON JANUARY 20 FOR ITS APPROVAL.
UNDER THE PROPOSAL

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ONLY POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH WERE

ABLE TO RUN CANDIDATES IN AT LEAST ONE HALF OF THE CONTESTS (THERE ARE 279 SEATS TO BE FILLED) WOULD BE

ALLOWED TO FIELD CANDIDATES IN THE APRIL 4 ELECTION. AT A JANUARY 19 PRESS CONFERENCE PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOTT DEFLECTED QUESTIONS ON THIS PROPOSAL, GIVING NO INDICATION OF HIS VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT OR WHETHER THAI CABINET WOULD SOON CONSIDER SUCH A PROPOSAL.

2. ACCORDING TO THE CHIEF OF THE ELECTION DIVISION OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, THIS PROPOSAL WOULD BE PUT INTO EFFECT BY A ROYAL DECREE ISSUED UNDER ARTICLE 190 OF THE CONSTITUTION. THIS ARTICLE GIVES THE KING THE RIGHT TO ISSUE AN EMERGENCY DECREE WHICH SHALL HAVE THE FORCE OF AN ACT IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY WHEN THERE IS AN URGENT NECESSITY TO MAINTAIN THE NATIONAL OR PUBLIC SAFETY OR NATIONAL ECONOMIC SECURITY OR TO AVERT PUBLIC CALAMITY. WHILE MANY POLITICIANS, INCLUDING DEMOCRAT LEADER SENI PRAMOT, HAVE PUBLICLY SUPPORTED REDUCING THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES, THERE IS SHARP DISAGREEMENT OVER THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF SUCH A ROYAL DECREE.

3. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, SAWET PIAMPHONGSAN, FORMER HEAD OF THE SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY, HAS MADE AN APPLICATION TO FORM A NEW PARTY CALLED THE FREE AGRARIAN PARTY. SAWET AND EIGHT FORMER MEMBERS OF THE SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY, WHO REFUSED TO JOIN IN SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT AT THE TIME OF THE JANUARY 8 CABINET RESHUFFLE, ARE NOW DECIDING WHETHER TO FORM A SEPARATE PARTY OR TO JOIN THE DEMOCRAT PARTY.

4. ACCORDING TO THE ACTION OF JANUARY 17, THE RIGHT WING NAWAPHON GROUP WILL SUPPORT THE THAMMA THIPPHATHAI (SOVEREIGN JUSTICE) PARTY RECENTLY FORMED BY METHI KAMPET. ACCORDING TO WATTANA KIAUWIMON, SPOKESMAN FOR THE NAWAPHON MOVEMENT, THE NEW PARTY'S LEADERSHIP WOULD NOT PERSONALLY BE INVOLVED IN POLITICS OR IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS, BUT
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WOULD SUPPORT THE THAMMA THIPPHATHAI PARTY.

5. ON JANUARY 17, BUNTHE G THONGSAWAT MINISTER OF JUSTICE, TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE KAMNAN/PUYAIBAN (LOCAL ELECTIONS) BILL HAD BEEN SUBMITTED BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE KING FOR HIS SIGNATURE. HE SAID THAT ONCE THE BILL IS ENDORSED BY THE KING, ELECTIONS FOR VILLAGE

HEADMEN COULD BE HELD WITHIN 90 DAYS. THIS INFORMATION WAS CONFIRMED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER BY YUWARAT KAMONWET, CHIEF OF THE ELECTION DIVISION OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.

6. THERE HAS BEEN WIDE SPECULATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD ALLOW THE KAMNAN/PUYAIBAN BILL TO LAPSE IN ORDER TO CURRY FAVOR WITH THE VILLAGE HEADMEN PRESENTLY IN OFFICE. THESE MEN COULD BE IMPORTANT IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 152 OF THE THAI CONSTITUTION, WHEN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IS DISSOLVED, A BILL WHICH HAS NOT BEEN SIGNED BY THE KING WITHIN NINETY DAYS LAPSES.

7. COMMENT: AT THIS POINT IT IS BY NO MEANS CLEAR WHETHER LOCAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD AFTER THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS OR WHETHER, IN EFFECT, THE KING WILL TAKE NO ACTION ON THE BILL AND IT WILL EXPIRE.
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